



PHIL 371

Instructor Winter Session, Term 1 2024

Prof. Edward Slingerland edward.slingerland@ubc.ca

IBLC 132 Tuesday, Thursday 11-12:30 p.m.

Office: Buch E163

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Also virtual, by appointment:

<https://ubc.zoom.us/j/4422938752?pwd=aGxFRVU5bkZvUS9kUWxSMmFsWktCdz09>

Meeting ID: 442 293 8752

Passcode: 520254

TA:

Office:

Course Description

This course is designed to give students a thorough introduction to early (pre 221 BCE) Chinese thought, its contemporary implications, and the role of philosophy and religion in human flourishing. This period of Chinese history witnessed the formation of all of the major indigenous schools of Chinese thought (Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism and Legalism), which in turn had an impact on the development of East Asian cultural history that is still felt today. Students will be exposed to both received texts and recently discovered archeological texts; this combination of sources will both enrich students' understanding of the world of thought in early China and call into question the boundaries drawn between the traditionally-defined "schools" such as Daoism or Confucianism.

Important themes to be discussed include the ideal of *wu-wei* or “effortless action,” the paradox of how one can consciously try not to try, models of the self and self-cultivation, rationality versus emotions, trust and human cooperation, and the structure and impact of different spiritual and political ideals. We will also explore parallels with Western philosophical and religious traditions, the relevance of early Chinese thought for contemporary debates in ethics, moral education, and political philosophy, and the manner in which early Chinese models of the self anticipate recent developments in the evolutionary and cognitive sciences.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will have an understanding of:

- the basics of Chinese thought from earliest times to the Qin unification (221 BCE)
- what it means to study religious or philosophical thought from an academic perspective
- what we mean by “religion” or “philosophy”
- different models of ethics and ethical reasoning
- the basics of how the human mind works (basic cognitive science and social psychology)
- the connection between Chinese thought and contemporary issues and modern scientific models of the self
- benefits of studying ancient and alternative cultures for citizens of a globalized world

Course Format

Class lectures, in-class quizzes and in-class midterm will take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays. There is also a final exam. **Also please note that use of electronic devices, including laptop computers, is not permitted during class;** students needing a special concession in this regard must consult with the instructor the first week of class.

Required Texts

Ivanhoe, P.J. and Van Norden, Bryan (eds.), *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (3rd edition)

[Note: Please be sure to obtain the latest edition of *RCCP*, which contains new sections that we will be using. Students must use the translations in *RCCP*, as translations of classical texts into English or Mandarin Chinese are highly variable and often unreliable.]

Custom Course Pack

Recommended Text

Slingerland, Edward. *Trying Not to Try: Ancient China, Modern Science and the Power of Spontaneity*

[This provides information related to the lecture material and would be helpful background reading.]

Course Requirements

Students are expected to attend all lectures and to keep up with the course readings; the lectures are designed to provide a background to (rather than a synopsis of) the assigned texts, and neither will be sufficient in isolation to provide an adequate grasp of the course material. There will be eleven 10-minute pop quizzes over the course of the semester (approximately once a week). Although the quizzes cannot be made up, the lowest two scores will be dropped.

Students are expected to attend all lecture sessions and to sign an attendance sheet. Students' attendance grade will begin at 100%, and decrease by 8% with each absence. As with quizzes, no excuses will be accepted for absences from class; students are, in essence, being granted 2 free absences before their grade for this portion of the class will drop below the "A" range. Please note that any student found signing the attendance sheet for another student will be brought up on academic misconduct charges, with the typical sanction being an "F" (0) for the course.

Also please note that use of electronic devices, including laptop computers, is not permitted during class; students needing a special concession in this regard must consult with the instructor the first week of class.

In addition to the quizzes, students will be assessed on an in-class, midterm essay and a final exam. The midterm will be administered **in class on Tuesday, 10/29**. The quizzes and the final will consist of a mixture of multiple choice, ID, short answer and/or essay questions; the midterm will be a short, in-class essay. Grading for the course will be as follows:

Lecture attendance:	7%
Quizzes:	36% (4% each, 11 total, lowest 2 dropped)
Midterm:	22%
Final exam:	35%

Class Policies

Students who need to request accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Access and Diversity (<http://students.ubc.ca/about/access>) within the first week of class.

The final exam time and location will be announced in class as soon as it is available, and students will then have one week from the time of announcement to report any potential scheduling conflicts to the instructor; after this period, no alternate exam accommodations will be made. In any case, exam accommodations will only be made for conflicts with exams in other classes; personal travel plans cannot, under any circumstance, be accommodated, so please do not make vacation travel plans until the exam date is announced.

Academic concessions concerning make-up exams, class absences, etc. are granted only rarely and at the sole discretion of the instructor, and any concessions that are granted must also be officially cleared by Academic Advising (<http://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising/academic-performance/help-academic-concession>).

The instructor strictly adheres to the guidelines for Discipline for Academic Misconduct published in the UBC-Vancouver *Calendar* (<http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,286,0,0>) for plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty. It is the responsibility of the student to familiarize him- or herself with these guidelines.

Please disable all cell phones, beepers, personal communications devices, and any other sound-producing appliances before entering the classroom. **Also please note that use of electronic devices, including laptop computers, is not permitted during class;** students needing a special concession in this regard must consult with the instructor the first week of class.

Notes of class lectures may only be made for the purposes of individual or group study, or for other non-commercial purposes that reasonably arise from your membership in this class. Permission to make recordings of lectures must be requested from the instructor. Notes and recordings of this class may not be exchanged or distributed for any commercial purpose, for compensation, or for any purpose other than your personal study. Unless authorized by the University in advance and explicitly and in writing permitted by the instructor, commercial or any non-personal use of class notes or recordings constitutes an unauthorized activity, and students who violate this policy are subject to University discipline.

Schedule of Lectures and Readings

09/03 Imagine Day, no class

09/05 **Why (and how) do we study other cultures?** This lecture will focus on what it means to study religious or philosophical thought from an academic perspective, what we mean by “religion” or “philosophy,” and why studying Chinese thought in particular might be helpful. We will also discuss the structure of human cognition (two systems theory).

Readings

Course Pack: Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, Introduction (pp. 1-18), Chapter One (pp. 19-37)

09/10 **How is psychology related to philosophy?** We will discuss the relevance of empirical work on the human mind to philosophical issues, and how this relates to different models of ethics, different theories about how human beings made the transition to large-scale societies, and the distinctive sorts of spiritual ideals (and tensions) that come with an emphasis on virtues and ethical know-how.

Readings

Course Pack: Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, Chapter Seven (pp. 168-196)

09/12 **Introduction to Early China.** This lecture will focus on an introduction to early Chinese history, the first historical dynasties in China (the Shang and Zhou), and themes in early Chinese religion

Readings

Course Pack: Excerpts from *Book of Odes*, *Book of Documents*

09/17 **Against Orientalism.** We will discuss distinctive features of early Chinese thought as well as the tendency in Western scholarship to exaggerate differences between “East” and “West” or exoticize early Chinese thought.

Readings

Course Pack:

Excerpt from McDonald, Edward. (2009). Getting over the Walls of Discourse: “Character Fetishization” in Chinese Studies. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 68(04), 1189-1213. (Canvas)

Henrich, Joseph. (2014). Rice, Psychology and Innovation. *Science*, 344, 593-594.

<http://science.sciencemag.org/content/344/6184/593>

09/19 **Confucius: Dedication to the Past.** We’ll begin digging into specific thinkers with the first great philosopher of China, Confucius, and the task he faced of rescuing what he saw as a profoundly degenerated age—one that reflected a sharp decline from the spiritual and political harmony of the ancient. His proposed solution was to reshape human beings into perfected sages through ritual, classical texts, and the arts.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Kongzi (Confucius) “the Analects” (Books 1-6, pp. 3-21)

- 09/24 **Confucius: Moral Training and Flexibility.** Confucius wanted the student to reshape themselves through dedication to the classics, but also demanded that they actively participated in the project of self-cultivation. Early Confucian moral self-cultivation will be our first example of a system intended to build cold cognition into hot: the make external cultural forms spontaneous and natural. What Confucius has much to say about the role of cultural forms, the relationship of the individual to society, and the inextricably social nature of human beings serves as an important corrective to some of excessively individualist aspects of our modern self-conceptions.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Kongzi (Confucius) “the Analects” (Books 7-13, pp. 21-37)

- 09/26 **Confucian wu-wei.** Wu-wei is not typically associated with Confucianism, but it is very much the goal of Confucius of the *Analects*. In this lecture we’ll discuss Confucian wu-wei, the relationship of wu-wei to *de* (charismatic virtue), and the paradox of wu-wei in the *Analects*.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Kongzi (Confucius) “the Analects” (Books 13-20, pp. 37-53)

- 10/01 **Laozi: return to nature.** In these lectures we’ll discuss the Daoist backlash against Confucianism in the form of Laozian “primitivism” as expressed in the *Daodejing*, the world’s first documented counter-cultural movement. Laozi advocated rejecting learning, technology and society and a return to a natural, simple life in small agricultural villages.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Laozi (the Daodejing) (Chapters 1-27; pp. 173-185)

- 10/03 **Laozi: the desires of the eye.** In his warnings against the dangers of hypocrisy and the potentially corrupting influence of social norms, Laozi has much to teach about the value of simplicity and authenticity.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Laozi (the Daodejing) (Chapters 28-57; pp. 186-199)

- 10/08 **Laozi and the problem of trying not to try.** In this lecture we’ll talk about new insights into the *Daodejing* that have been gained from recently discovered archeological texts and explore some tensions in the text, such as the question of why we need to try to be natural in the first place, and what this might say about human nature

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Laozi (the Daodejing) (Chapters 58-81; pp. 200-210)

- 10/10 **Mozi the Rationalist.** Impatient with both the Daoist primitivists and the Confucians, Mozi was the world's first great utilitarian or consequentialist thinker, arguing that rational calculation of social benefits should drive our behavior.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Mozi (pp. 59-85)

- 10/15 **Mozi and impartial caring.** With his doctrine of "impartial caring," Mozi's views echo those of modern utilitarians such as Peter Singer, sharing the same strengths and weaknesses. We will also discuss Mozi's anti-elitism and religious fundamentalism.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Mozi (pp. 85-108)

Course pack:

Excerpt from Singer, Peter. Family, affluence and morality. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Spring, 1972, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Spring, 1972), pp. 229- 243.

Brand, Russell. (2014). What monkeys and the Queen taught me about inequality. *The Guardian*, Monday October 13 2014.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/oct/13/monkeys-queen-inequality-capitalism-rich-poor-private-security>

- 10/17 **Later Mohist logic.** This lecture will explore the linguistic turn in Warring States thought, when philosophers became interested in the problem of how words match up with reality, and whether or not logical propositions about the world could guide human behavior.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, The School of Names (pp. 161-168)

- 10/22 **Yang Zhu and the "discovery of the body."** In this lecture we will explore the so-called "physiological turn" and a new focus on the individual self and physical body in the mid-Warring States, focusing on the thinker Yang Zhu.

Readings

RCCP, Yangist Writings, pp. 111-117

Course Pack: Excerpts from Emerson, John. 1996. Yang Chu's [Yang Zhu's] Discovery of the Body. *Philosophy East and West*, Volume 46-4: 533-566.

- 10/24 **The Guodian School of Confucianism.** Recently discovered bamboo texts from the Warring States contain writings that may belong to a previously lost school of Confucianism, sometime associated with Confucius' grandson, Zisi, or a figure known as Gaozi. The Guodian school seems to advocate a picture of human nature that strikes a middle ground in the coming debate between Mencius and Xunzi.

Readings

RCCP: Nature Comes From the Mandate, pp. 391-399

Course pack: *Excerpts from Guodian Confucian Texts*

10/29 In-class Midterm

- 10/31 **Mencius and Confucian internalism.** The first follower on Confucius in the Warring States revives the thought of Confucius with a twist: cultivation and refinement are important, but only because they represent the natural development of tendencies already inside us.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Mengzi (Mencius) (pp. 121-133)

- 11/05 **Mencius and the moral sprouts.** A great moral psychologist, Mencius argued that we all possess the sprouts of proper moral behavior, and need to cultivate them like a patient farmer. From a contemporary perspective, his model of moral education looks both psychologically sophisticated and prescient.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Mengzi (Mencius) (pp. 133-144)

- 11/07 **Mencian extension.** In this lecture we'll explore Mencian gradualism and internalism, as well as the paradox of wu-wei as it appears in Mencius' thought.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Mengzi (Mencius) (pp. 144-153)

- 11/12 **Zhuangzi and the empty mind.** Suspicious of any fixed, explicit system of morality, the "Daoist" Zhuangzi advocated freeing the mind of all doctrines and value judgments, "fasting the mind," so that our innate Heavenly tendencies can be activated.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Zhuangzi (pp. 224-238)

- 11/14 **Zhuangzi: guided by the spirit.** Zhuangzi believed that the only way to move through the world properly was to get beyond linguistic distinctions and logical thought in order to perceive and engage with reality directly. He has much to teach us about the power of the unconscious and the importance of embodied skills.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Zhuangzi (pp. 239-256)

- 11/19 **Zhuangzi on walking the two paths.** One way to see the Zhuangzian sage is as being in the world but not of it. We will also explore the paradox of wu-wei in the Zhuangzi, and how this tension was inherited by certain later schools of Chinese thought, such as Chan/Zen Buddhism.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Zhuangzi (pp. 256-265)

- 11/21 **Xunzi and Confucian culture.** Xunzi marks in many ways a return to the original vision of Confucius, where spiritual and moral perfection is seen as the product of a long process of training and self-cultivation.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Xunzi (pp. 270-283)

Boyd, Robert, Richerson, Peter, & Henrich, Joseph. (2011). The cultural niche: why social learning is essential for human adaptation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 108 Suppl 2, 10918-10925.

http://www.pnas.org/content/108/Supplement_2/10918.abstract

- 11/26 **Xunzi and human nature.** If human nature is bad, how were humans able to create Confucian culture? What is the role of free will in the Xunzian model of the self?

NOTE: Because of a professional conference, class lecture will be replaced by two on-line videos that can be found at the URLs provided

Xunzi on the mind and free will (15:08)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTSR0-RrAq&list=PLBoEKpcYXFH8nfbMWlgLjNTPJjGgOltcU&index=2&ab_channel=ChineseThought%3AAncientChinaMeetsModernScience)

Xunzi on the Origins of Confucian Culture (23:27)

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La_bF9SjDvE&list=PLBoEKpcYXFH8nfbMWlgLjNTPJjGgOltcU&index=3&ab_channel=ChineseThought%3AAncientChinaMeetsModernScience)

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Xunzi (pp. 283-297)

- 11/28 **Xunzian carving and polishing.** One way to look at Xunzian self-cultivation is as a means of building cold cognition into hot. In this lecture we will also discuss Xunzi's very modern-sounding ideas about religion, including the fact that he was one of the earliest naturalist or atheistic philosophers in world history, presenting a functionalist view of religion that anticipates in many ways the views of modern scholars.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, the Xunzi (pp. 298-319)

- 12/03 **Xunzi and Mencius and Perennial Philosophical Debates.** The debate between Mencius and Xunzi on human nature mirrors similar debates in other philosophical traditions, which in turn undergird liberal versus conservative views of the relationship of the individual to the state or to religious traditions. We will explore both the outlines of this debate and why it may be intractable because of basic differences in inborn dispositions in humans.

Readings

Course Pack: Graham, Jesse; Haidt, Jonathan, Nosek, Brian A. Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 96(5), May 2009, 1029-1046

Hatemi, Peter et al. (2011). A genome-wide analysis of liberal and conservative political attitudes. *Journal of Politics*, 73(1), 1-15.

http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/s0022381610001015?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

12/05 **Legalism and the Unification of China.** In this final lecture we will discuss the “Legalist” school associated with Xunzi’s disciple, Hanfeizi, and how it can be seen as growing out of, but significantly differing from, Xunzi’s views. This will also involve students in a consideration of broader theoretical issues concerning the rule of law versus norms-based theories of human sociality. We will conclude by noting the role of Hanfeizi’s thought in the unification of China under the Qin.

Readings

Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy, Shen Dao (pp. 214-219), the *Hanfeizi* (pp. 324-336, 353-371)